

22| rains come, laying aside any other task no matter what his profession
24| may be. The Mossi year is divided as described below, and year follows
year without bringing any changes in this monotonous existence.

The rainy season from May to October is the time of the hard labor of cultivation, and all Mossi devote themselves fully to the task. Men, women, and children are always in the fields. They cut down the

● [805] thorn bushes at the beginning of May, as soon as the Pleiades appear on the horizon and the baobabs begin to burgeon. This is spring (sign). For this work they use a small hatchet, a few centimeters wide, with a short, easily grasped handle, and a forked stick to fold back the thorny branches so they may more conveniently be cut at the base. The branches are piled in heaps and burned one evening as soon as they are dry. When the first copious rains fall, usually in June, the natives immediately sow the small white millet used to make sarabo, the staple of the aboriginal diet, and the large red millet or sorghum from which millet beer is made.

Sowing is regarded as one of the most laborious tasks, because it forces the sower to remain bent so as not to lose sight of the stretch already covered. The natives sow with an old worn-out hoe, with which they strike the ground twice in order to make a small hole. The grain is carried in a gourd held by a string to the left hand; this leaves the fingers free to seize a few grains which are dropped into the hole. A little soil is then replaced by the hoe. When the rain has soaked the ground more thoroughly and the millet has begun to grow, maize is sowed around the huts.

Following the first weeding of the fields, beans are sowed among the shoots of small millet, and cotton among those of large red millet or near the watercourses. The ground is then prepared to sow rice, peanuts, and native peas. Meanwhile the fields must be hoed incessantly to remove the weeds that would smother the young millet shoots. If the rain is too abundant at the end of June, the cultivators are often overwhelmed with work, and they complain that it has become impossible to keep their fields clean. Gombo (okra) and all the condiments for making sauce, peppers, tomatoes, etc., are planted around the maize fields, near the huts, along with /46/ native hemp and all sorts of gourd plants. In favorable soil, hence only in certain areas, fabirama, manioc, and yams are cultivated in a special manner.

22| Those who raise chicks take them along to the fields in an oblong
235 cage of plaited straw or willow. When they get to the spot where

221 they will be working, they open the door of the cage and the mother
235 hen comes out. She is tied to the basket with a string, and the chicks
run around her. If their master finds a good termite nest, he takes it
to his little charges and breaks it in two. In the evening he puts the
hen and chicks back into the basket and carries it home suspended from
his shoulder.

• [803] The heavy rains fall in July and August. This is summer (seoro).
221 Whenever the ground is not too soggy, everybody runs to the fields at
241 dawn and works until nightfall. One or two women stay home to pre-
476 pare food for the laborers, whose strength must be maintained for all
this hard work. No one may rest. Only the sick and the helpless old
people stay home, and even they are put to work, looking after the
babies. This is the time when wealthy people call friends to their aid.
The owner of a vast field has every member of the village notified —
especially the young men, those who own some obligation toward
him, those who have an eye on his daughters — that on a certain date
he will be weeding his field, and at dawn of that day everyone gathers
and labors while the drums spur them on. On another occasion, this
man in turn will help those who have worked for him. This practice
of mutual aid is very advantageous because a field overgrown with
weeds is cleaned in a single day, but it becomes onerous when people
must appeal to their neighbors several times in the course of a season.

221 The heavy rains stop in August or September, the maize is ripe,
241 and feasting begins. Roasted corn ears are a prized tidbit, especially
262 when the kernels are still tender. There is one kind of maize, faintly
sweet, which when sautéed in butter recalls our garden peas. Every-
where the children and even the elders feast on maize; everywhere
people offer a visitor a few ears of maize, which are often roasted on
the spot. When the maize harvest is completed, maize gruel, which
recalls the famous Italian polenta, advantageously replaces millet
mush and brings a pleasant change to the daily fare, especially since
gombo is ripening and adds variety to the sauce as well. Bellies fill
out, faces glow with health, and as a very natural sequence, hearts
are flooded with joy. The end of the dry season may have been diffi-
cult because millet was running low; the winter tasks may have been
laborious; but now everyone makes up for it. The harvested maize
is replaced in the fields by tobacco; its seedlings were prepared as
the harvest drew near.

[805] At the end of September or beginning of October, the large red
millet is ripe. This is autumn (houpéla). Maize is now too tough

221 the men bring bunches of peanuts. While nibbling on the green nuts
 241 and talking, they all separate the pods from the leaves. The latter
 [23] are carefully set aside along with the bean leaves. They make ex-
 cellent fodder for the horses during the dry season, when the sun has
 burned off all the grass in the bush.

221 By November harvesting is completed. The sun has already dried
 241 out the grass, and the time has come to cut straw for séko and roofing.
 356/48/ This task is usually reserved for children and servants (dakonré).
 857 The head of the household tells each one of them the number of straw
 bundles he is to cut, and every morning the children set off in groups,
 a sickle on their shoulders. They look for straw on the banks of the
 watercourses and return when the sun begins to scorch. This marks
 the end of the working day, and there is nothing to do now but rest.
 The dry season is indeed a time of rest, and from November to May
 there are no pressing tasks.

● [805] It gets cold in December. This is winter (sapolro). The natives
 221 gather at dawn around fires of millet stalks, twigs, or straw; anything
 241 combustible serves. Every newcomer must contribute an armful; it
 [372] is the price of admission to a seat near the fire. At the end of December
 476 all the straw for roofing has been stored, and then the small millet
 is threshed. Every inhabitant of the village has the use of the thresh-
 ing floor in turn. He notifies his friends and acquaintances as he did
 when he weeded his field. The millet beer is ready, and on the pre-
 vious day the women have covered the area with cow dung diluted in
 water to harden the floor. At dawn the friends arrive, and the millet
 is removed from the granary and spread out on the floor. This is done
 with the help of millet stalks tied together in bundles and dragged
 along the ground with ropes while a man bears down upon them.
 The flail is merely a stick cut in the bush, a tree branch shaped in
 such a way that the part which is held in the hand is rather thin and
 flexible, while the part which is used for threshing is quite thick and
 forms an obtuse angle with the part in the hand. The boys line up in
 a row, with the tots at either end; the drummers stand before or behind
 them; and the flails fall with the beat, crushing the ears of millet
 and separating the very dry grain from the stalks. All the while the
 old men sit in the shade of the granaries, talking, smoking, and
 sewing clothes. When the threshers get to the end of the floor, they
 retrace their steps and rest, while the old men gather with straw brooms
 the grain which has been scattered outside the pile.

Continuity and Change in African Cultures

776 bush is included in the orderly universe which the Mossi have fabri-
 823 cated, it exists at the periphery and is a thing to be feared. The name of
 this unknown and unowned part of the bush is synonymous with fear.
 [828] Dreams in which an individual sees frightening images are called "bush
 creeping up" (*weogo doore*) or "bush traps you" (*weogo n'yoko fo*). These
 phrases are also used to describe the emotional shock, the feeling of fear,
 elicited by the unexpected sight of a frightening object like a corpse or a
 lion.

Most important among the supernatural beings inhabiting the bush
 are the twin spirits (*kikirdisi*). Living in pairs or in larger groups, they
 inhabit the bush, caves, baobab trees, and certain dense thickets of
 underbrush. While specific details vary, it is generally conceded that
 they are small, about a foot tall, black like the Mossi, and of both sexes.
 Their social organization is like that of men: each group is ruled over by
 a twin spirit-chief (*Kikirdisi Naba*).

845 Twin children are always regarded as the emissaries of the twin spirits.
 776 Shortly after the birth of twins their mother takes a present of food to a
 place where the twin spirits are known to dwell. Leaving the gift and ex-
 pressing her thanks, she also makes it clear to the twin spirits that if they
 have any sort of malicious intent in sending her their children they might
 as well take them back immediately, since she will tolerate no foolishness.
 If, through her new children, they plan to torment her, they should save
 their efforts and desist at once. While the twin spirits are frequently mis-
 chief-makers, they are more frivolous than malicious and essentially
 neither good nor evil. The death of newborn twins is accepted with relief,
 for it is believed certain that the twin spirits have been thwarted in their
 mischievous intent and have conceded defeat.

THE ECONOMIC AND CEREMONIAL CYCLE

796 A brief description of the economic cycle and the ceremonials which
 221 mark its phases will serve to illustrate the way the Mossi perceive their
 relationship to the forces of their natural, supernatural, and social mi-
 lieux and the methods by which they seek to assure their well-being
 through control of these forces. The year is usually divided into twelve
 moons whose names refer either to the principal economic activity of the
 [805] season or to a ceremonial which accompanies it.

The first moon of the Mossi year is called "Gambo" after the name of
 the village which celebrates its first rain-making ceremony (*Tengana*) at
 this time. Although the rains are still five or six months away, this ritual
 marks the beginning of the new economic cycle. Each household which
 possesses land controlled by the earth custodian sends one of its young
 girls with an offering of millet gruel to place at the altar of Tenga Wende,
 the terrestrial manifestation of the deity. The earth custodian advises

9. Trade and Markets Among the Mossi People

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larger markets there were and are solid stalls which are built and tenanted by merchants. In the small district and village markets, these stalls are built out of millet stalks which offer little but protection against the noonday sun on market days. Men build these structures for their womenfolk and for themselves. Some of the shelters which are not used for trading serve as galleries where the young blades look out and comment on the passing scene. Others are used as meeting places by adult men who sit and discuss all sorts of affairs. Still others are used by the older men, who gather there to arrange marriages between their several families, wait for gifts from younger men who seek wives, or spend a great deal of time reminiscing about their youthful adventures. Those persons who do not have such shelters sit in the sun or use grass lean-tos as protection from the sun.

Except in the large towns, Mossi markets are held between the hours of 10:00 A.M. and 4:00 P.M. every fourth day. In the larger towns there are daily markets, but these remained unimportant until today when they serve a growing urban population. The capital city of Wagadougou now even has an "evening" market which opens about 4:00 P.M. and closes at about 9:00 P.M. In addition, numerous daily markets have sprung up in many of its wards. The three-day markets are, however, the traditional type, and they are still the most numerous through the country. By "three-day market" I mean that a market is held one day, not held over the two following days, and then held again on the next day. These markets also have a 21-day cycle from one *Ragakasanga* or *Rag'kasanga* ("larger market") on a Friday to another *Rag'kasanga* on a Friday three weeks later, a total of seven markets between the two important ones. The people give no adequate explanation for the observance of the three-day cycle or the 21-day cycle. One man did suggest that it took the women three days to prepare beer and this was why markets could not be held more often, but even he did not speculate about the 21-day cycle.¹⁰ This same man did point out, however, that the cycle made little difference to persons who really liked to go to market, since it was possible for

(10) Zahan (1954 : 373) apparently found one of the few Mossi informants with a mystical bent; he reports that the seven three-day cycles of markets in the 21-day cycle have the following significance for the Yatenga people: "The first of these numbers explains the cycle of the person (7 symbolizes the complete person: male [to which the Mossi assign the number 3] and female [to which they assign the number 4], the second that of the creation." He believes that each market starts a new cycle, a beginning and an end: "the seventh market" signifies the most perfect equilibrium: the one which exists between the universe, mankind, and the divinity." In a footnote he suggests that this symbolism is not too different among the Dogon, who are "ideologically and geographically close to the Mossi." Peter Hammond, who worked in Yatenga, could not find this kind of symbolism.